

Research Outline
The Island of Curiosities
Inge Hoonte, January 12, 2012

“Everything is already in the room.”
-- Laurie Carlos

Combining real and imagined narratives, I document human interaction through observational writing, performance, photography, video, and sound. I investigate the space between people, and the attempt to connect with one another across this undetermined terrain: a constantly changing landscape amid physical, emotional, sociopolitical, and psychogeographical boundaries, among many other. Examining the play between reaching out and keeping one's distance in both intimate and everyday relationships, I require myself, as well as participants and audience, to be playful and vulnerable, while embracing the unknown outcome when our paths collide.

For my current project *The Island of Curiosities* (working title), I'm departing from the angle of the Cabinet of Curiosities / Wunderkammer, and the compendium of aquatic images and descriptions Visboeck, which I consider to be a Wunderkammer in the shape of a book. This manuscript by Adriaen Coenensz., dated 1577-1581, documents all his knowledge on the ocean and its inhabitants in hand-written descriptions and drawings. In their own ways, both types of collections interest me more conceptually than literally, or as a metaphor to work with.



Cabinet of Curiosities from 18th Century London
Collection display above my desk



Detail from Visboeck by Adriaen Coenensz.
Collection display in my livingroom



I tend to display my own collection of findings and small belongings in windowsills, little alcoves, in the hallway, on the fridge, on the wall above my desk, etc. In any new dwelling, however briefly occupied, I surround myself with a selection of these items, carefully (re)arranged into various compositions to make the space familiar, mine, and create a sense of belonging. The items range from photographs I find on the street, newspaper clippings, reminders on post-it notes, to shells, little plastic figurines, porcelain dolls without a head, postcards, store-bought fawns, a lamp shaped like a cactus, and once, a big stone crab. I pick them up on a trip with a friend to the beach, a trip by myself to the beach, on my way to the grocery store, at a thrift store, on the street, and friends send me things in the mail as well. With each move, I throw some things away, pack the rest up in a box, and assemble a new collage at the next place, continuing the histories of my memories. As with any collage, the placement of and relationship between the objects is very important.

I'm interested in relating the way that I collect 'curiosities' to the way that I document and collage my memories and experiences while creating new work. I often like to work on several smaller things at once, which sometimes end up being stand-alone pieces, and other times come together in a performance, video vignette, radio show, series of posters, or collection of writing.

Within Networked Media, I've started to utilize these fragments as databases, from which I can build scripts, stories, narratives. Looking at my practice from this angle, I've realized that a lot of my projects function as methodologies to order information. In ordering the information, I devise systems for an intimate audience experience while aiming to provide a setting for different interpretations for the same body of knowledge. Information that can be reconfigured by the audience, leaving space to insert themselves and form their own, personal associative experience. My work is polyphonous, layered and ambiguous, creating a space in which I can collage seemingly disparate information into a dense and rich construction to expose another layer of meaning -- in-between and behind the work, beyond the subject matter. As a researcher, I get the most out of this process of creating and discovering new connections between various fragments. To find unexpected links and deeper meaning. My goal is to further develop and define this connective tissue, the glue that holds these fragments together, while building a larger, more encompassing framework or narrative around it, without losing its intimate quality.

The Island of Curiosities: A Book & A Series of Performative Events

I'm preparing the material in two ways, which inform and enrich each other. One is compiling a selection of writing, scraps, and images I've assembled over the past years into a one-off book. I've posted some of this content on my wiki, most recently *Cage's Cave / Cave's Cage*, a short text in which John Cage, Nicolas Cage, and Nick Cave have gathered in a cave, and morphed into one person to perform poetic content from their entire combined oeuvre.

For the book I'm pulling inspiration from the Visboeck, research on the life aquatic, and the IC-98 publication *Foucault's Sleep - Models for a Proposal*. This 72 page gathering of texts, collages, sketches, models and drawings departs from the conceptualization of a deserted island to which all surveillance cameras of the world have been transported. The cameras are turned toward the horizon to keep an eye on the world which can actually not be seen as it's a very remote island. Within my publication, I will further touch on topics of isolation, loneliness, getting lost, escaping, disappearing, hiding, and exploring, discovering and revealing the in-between, which indirectly brings to light issues of modernity. The ocean and its islands will serve as a metaphor to look at man as a separate entity among the archipelago (community/society) allowing for an experiential identity comprised of constant sedimentation. "In the archipelago, the islands don't define the milieu but the space in between" (IC-98, 2006), where the

ocean's current is in constant flux. On the other hand, considering the confines of our human bodies, we might be so stuck on our islands, that our real yearning might not be the island get-away vacation, but to get off the island, and be one with the ocean?

In the other aspect of the project, a selection of this research material is applied to an experiential environment in which live performance and storytelling explore the bridges and gaps between above mentioned themes. I will be organizing events from February onward under the title **Under/Up the Stairs**. This is a project space in two locations: my hallway and stairwell at home in Rotterdam, as well as the space above and underneath the stairs at Noe Kidder's apartment in Brooklyn. Noe is a filmmaker I've been working with for a few years, and have previously produced a small book with which was written on and around the waters of New York and Fire Island. Together we will curate events and shows for these strange in-between spaces, and coordinate opportunities to connect them, and the people in it, such as openings, readings, and presentations. An informal monthly **Sunday Salon** at my apartment will provide room to work with live, improvisational performance. The thin walls and floors of my building allow participants to play material and stage actions and dialogs in the apartments above and below my apartment, while being able to hear them in between. Under/Up the Stairs is a space for dialog, and to showcase, and present works-in-progress.

In the first show, opening for a small audience in Brooklyn on February 4, I will adapt the space in Noe's apartment and connect it to my own, working with the theme of hiding/revealing. Under the stairs, I will display the poem *Cage's Cave / Cave's Cage*. Up the stairs, I will install a stereo composition of footsteps and conversations recorded in my building. There will be one speaker at the top of the stairs, and one at the bottom, with the sound traveling in-between and along the stairs, where the audience is seated.

After this, other people are invited to partake and transform the spaces. I'm currently working on the program structure, to foster overlap between events in both spaces, and allow for moments of reflection in between.

The works produced for Under/Up the Stairs, the Sunday Salon, and the publication support each other and connect. Through the process of creating and editing, I will further refine the format to display the book, my research and work for an event in July. At the moment, there are inklings to predict the future. In addition to the book, I can easily see the text I wrote on installing a heart in your chest be complemented by the sound of my looped records stuck on endless repeat. Or a looped video recording of the ocean's rhythmic washing ashore, paired with the gesture of a hand exploring the space between two bodies in a similar movement. Varied, but no cacophony -- a tranquil space. A place to ponder over subjects, and how they relate to you. A space where that little bit of me connects to that little bit of you. A small, intimate, yet expansive space.

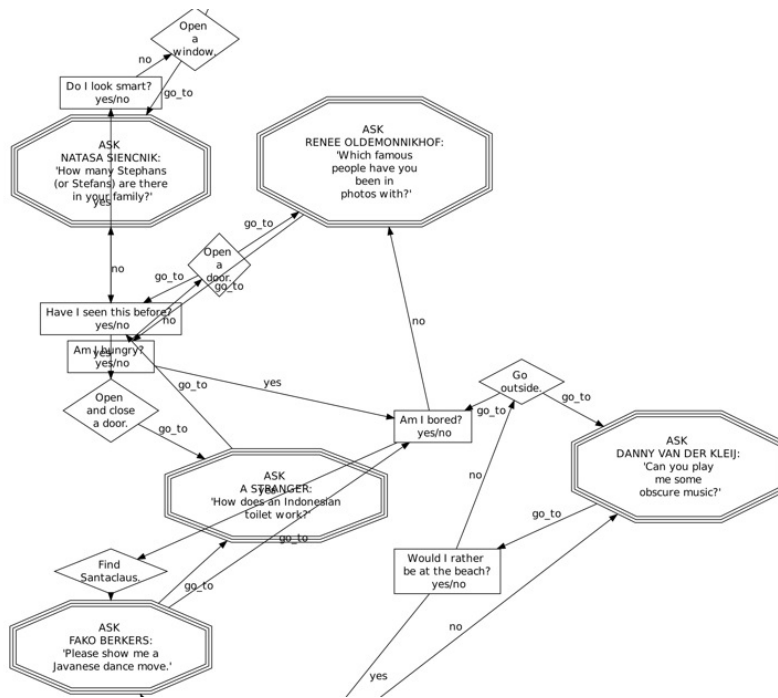


"It is as if you have entered an underground workshop (...) existing in an alternative universe. Sounds (...) enhance this atmosphere. The objects / experiments that occupy the cabin are more than a reflection of the traveler's obsessions; they are an escape route for the viewer into a forgotten world."

-- Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller on Ship o'Fools, the small ship they converted into an immersive environment, 2010

Selection of recent work

Random Personalized Exhibition Experience v.10.5.11 (2010/2011)



This project establishes connections between people to create unexpected narratives in an exhibition experience.

Based on various algorithms, a computer script connects three separate sets of data to one another, namely Actions, Questions, and People. The connections that the program forms between these nodes are random, and differ each time the program is executed. The results, or links between nodes and how they relate to one another, are processed by a graphic visualization software (GraphViz), and saved as a PDF. The links between nodes are visualized by an arrow, and each group of nodes has its own predetermined box or shape. The file is then printed onto paper. This map forms the base for the navigation of an exhibition space, in which People present on paper are also present in the space. The user of the map, the player of this textual game, is the exhibition audience. The player picks a point to start, and follows the questions and actions from there to create an individual experience.

Let's say you start at the action 'open and close a door.' After you perform the action, an arrow on the map leads you to the question 'Are you wearing two pairs of socks?' Answering 'no' then takes you to 'Ask Natasa Siencnik "How many Stephans (or Stefans) are there in your family?"', and so on. Although each map is different, the players are subjected to a predefined script. They are mere agents performing a communicative routine through short interactions with strangers who sing, refuse to tell you their full name, or admit they'd save their computer should their building be on fire, not their cat.

Captain Tweet (2011)

Captain Tweet is a live twitter feed (twitter.com/tweet_captain) that I created for the HMS Weymouth, a settler ship traveling from Portsmouth, United Kingdom, to Algoa Bay in South Africa. The feed consists of entries in a travel log written in 1819-1820 by Captain Turner, the ship's captain, which I copied from the site theshipslist.com.

On this ship, over 450 settlers including children left England to start a new life abroad.

From July-November 2011, the historical log entries for this ocean journey were sent to the captain's Twitter account in real time by an automated script. Each minute of the day, the script runs through the remaining list of entries, and if there's a date and time that matches for that exact minute, the message is posted to Twitter. The feed includes information on the food reserves, the weather conditions, and the high number of dead bodies being thrown overboard. As such, early 19th century events are seemingly written in the present.



tweet_captain Captain Tweet

Saw the Island of Annabona SSW 11 or 12 leagues

57 minutes ago



tweet_captain Captain Tweet

Performed the customary ceremony in crossing the Equator

10 Sep



tweet_captain Captain Tweet

Committed the body of the above infant to the deep

1 Sep



tweet_captain Captain Tweet

Departed this life ELIZABETH STORTON settlers child

1 Sep



tweet_captain Captain Tweet

heavy squalls with thunder and lightning

Dear Philip E. Agre (2011)

Dear Philip E. Agre is a correspondence project in the form of three letters to Phil Agre, a scholar and professor in information sciences. He was reported missing by his former employer UCLA in October 2009, and found and deemed safe in January 2010 by LA's Sheriff's department. He requested to be left alone, and disappeared again. A few colleagues who feared for his mental and physical health teamed up to search for him. They updated those interested through Twitter, Facebook, and a blog. Countless people expressed their concern by posting messages on the very networks he chose to abandon. After searching for him for over a year, a member of the group was able to talk to him in person in February 2011. Mr. Agre again expressed the desire to be left alone, to remain "offline."

The project departs from and reflects on Phil Agre's essay Writing and Representation, in which he uses examples of everyday behavioral routines to illustrate the way in which computation and communication technologies affect human interaction and privacy. Seeking to understand the subject matter better, and relate it to my own practice, I wrote him a letter. And another one. And another one. Herein, I meticulously describe brief, fleeting encounters with people in my daily life, and relate them to his ideas on the obsession to constantly upkeep our always present, digital relationships the way our always-on world requires. By approaching communicational, interactive activities, both improvised and routine, from a computational standpoint, I ask him if he thinks we could device a mathematical analyzation using all variables involved in my previous encounters as a hypothetical solution to figuring out how to relate to people.

The more I found out about Phil Agre's disappearance and possible whereabouts, the more I became aware of the multiple layers of the project. An effort to communicate with someone who doesn't want to be reached easily turned into a process of talking to myself -- through him -- to gain a deeper understanding of my own developing practice. Not necessarily expecting a reply, the letters provided space to philosophize about mathematical, computational, and interactive problems, through practical examples.

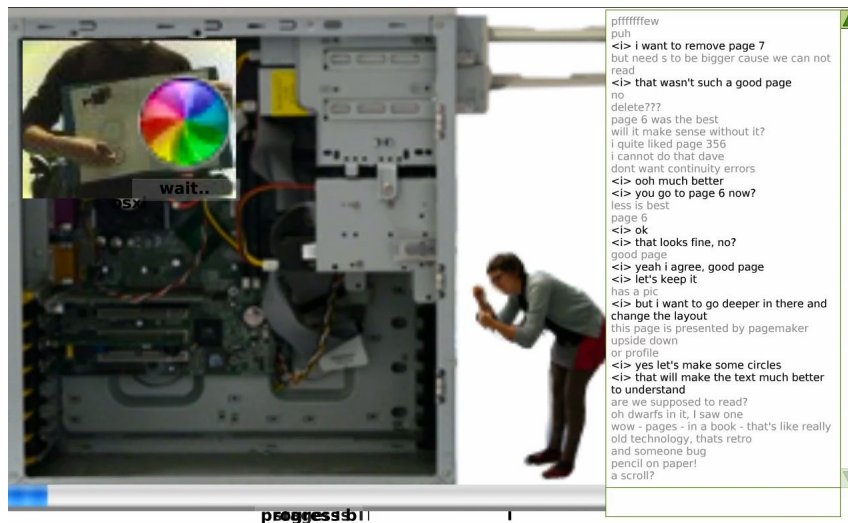
Is This On? (2011)

Concept: Birgit Bachler & Inge Hoonte; Performers & Development: Silvio Lorusso, Sebastian Schmieg, André Castro, Amy Suo Wu, Lieven van Speybroeck, Jasper van Loenen, Inge Hoonte; <http://upstage4.cyberperformance.net:6184/stages/isthison>

Presented as part of UpStage 11:11:11, a 24-hour, web-based performance event.

Is This On? projects a virtual apartment into a desktop computer, which are both displayed on the UpStage platform. Functioning like a dual-boot computer, the Proprietary family lives alongside the Open Source family. The script is inspired by conflicts between Apple, Windows and Linux. The characters bring to light various aspects of computing, such as the love/hate relationships between operating systems and their users, and the challenges one can face while interacting with and switching between these systems.

As such, actors appear to "live" inside a computer, as if operating tasks for the user whenever a document is searched for, read, etc. In the first performance, digital becomes physical: an avatar's body parts seemingly materialize from the website into the webcam area. In the third performance, the desktop environment is completely abandoned, with characters dancing in the typical green Windows7 pastures, or falling in love with GNU while playing Mac ball on the Mac beach.



11am -- first performance with minimal props



7:30pm -- third performance with new backgrounds, props, and storyline

Inspiration & References

"At the heart (...) here is the desire for constructive and inventive thought, for a form of attention that struggles to articulate an intractable object, in the full knowledge that the everyday is always going to exceed the ability to register it." -- Ben Highmore, 2002, *The Everyday Life Reader*, p3

* Stark, F. *Collected Writing: 1993-2003*

* Bateson, G., 2000. *Steps Toward an Ecology of Mind*. University of Chicago Press.

* Egmond, F., 2005, *Het Visboek, de wereld volgens Adriaen Coenen 1514-1587*. Zutphen: Uitgeversmaatschappij Walburg Pers.

* Socialtoolbox / IC-98, 2006. *Foucault's Sleep - Models for a Proposal*. Iconoclast Publications.

* Multidisciplinary performance work by Aki Sasamoto (Japan/New York)

* Installations and sound work by Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller

* Gabriel Lester, *Suspension of Disbelief*, Boijmans van Beuningen, seen 2011 (ten new and previously created dealing with fate and magical thinking)

* Omer Fast, Exhibition and publication, NIMk Amsterdam, seen 2011 (three complex video installations, centered around truth and fiction, individual and collective histories)

* Elmgreen & Dragset, *The One & The Many*, 2011, Onderzeebootloods Rotterdam (installation of an apartment building and its direct surroundings, with live actors walking among audience)

* Candice Breitz, *Legend*, 2005. (thirty channel video installation, recordings of Jamaican people simultaneously singing along to the record Legend by Bob Marley)

* Loops in work by people like Marijke van Warmerdam, Phil Niblock, David Lang